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TECHNOLOGICAL SCIENCE OR VARIATIONS OF IMMORALITY

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Abstract

The intention of this article is to establish a veritable philosophical and exploratory statement about Science. Without becoming technical or exclusive, the author addresses domains such as Robotics and Augmented Humans and their roles in a world of meaning, and to some extent, spirituality. Human activities are bound by their cognition, their morality and their communicability. Offering an interrogative and reflexive uptake vis-à-vis scientific adventures helps uncover the nature and mistakes of scientific approaches to creating and using knowledge.

Keywords: technology, spirituality, science, society, rationality

1. Introduction

Few people are intellectuals or specialists of spirituality, some have a sensibility for such a topic but many people today do not feel any urge to be spiritual or to study spirituality. As a matter of fact, many believers in Europe have wholly abandoned ship. And this dimension of human life generally receives no attention from those working in Robotics and Augmented Humans. Could this moral crisis be due in any way to the quick up-swing of technology-driven human activities? Has there been since the industrial revolution a violent paradigmatic shift taking us from a God-centred, through a human-centred to a gadget-centred world, that is from fear to exhilaration? This is certainly the case in some areas of human activity, such as in Science, business and related fields. It is so in Robotics because it was not in the beginning devised for handling our beliefs or producing human belief synthesis. It concentrated uniquely on aiding humans.

In the beginning of Robotics, the endeavour was very practical and task-oriented, it seems to have become driven also by a certain playfulness exhibited in over 200 laboratories [1] that work on the subject. Food for thought: can we affirm the same vigour in the high places of our religions? In this sense, our title could have been 'Robotics and Augmented Humans *versus* the Spiritual World'.

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However it may do so indirectly, does the attractiveness of technology for society really wreak havoc in the spiritual world?

Let's be more specific. Humanoid Robotics and Artificial Intelligence, despite the difficulties they experienced on the road to simulating humans – which I have treated elsewhere [2, 3] – has been caught up by its successes (8.7 million robots for domestic and personal usage were *purchased* in 2009). At the outset, there was never hope of obtaining the impressive behavioural results we have today and that are splashed throughout the media (*cf*. for example the first special issue of *National Geographic* (Oct-Nov 2011) in French). The automation of repetitive tasks that people no longer wish to perform and the general automatisation of large portions of services can be done in absence of spirituality. Making changes to our bodies generally calls for 'dis-observing' at least some aspects of morality, Christian or otherwise. This said, the closer 'roboticians', specialists in AI and vanguard medics come to reproducing or replacing man, or parts of humans, the more we need to carefully consider the questions of society's intentions; its technological integrations can be surprisingly helpful, agreeable to the human condition, stunning or abject.

2. Havoc in spirituality, is it wreaking in Science too?

Careful consideration is required whether the goal be to recreate spirituality within machines or to negotiate step-by-step the integration of technology-driven enhancements into what is understood in a canonical way to be a spiritual world. The social and physical appropriateness in examples of this could already be evaluated by the reader: the Japanese have a robotic priest programmed to perform marriages. No matter how serious this Reuters announcement is being taken [Http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/05/17/us-japan-robot-wedding-idUSTRE64G0J820100517], the idea is there. The work conducted by Englishman Professor Kevin Warwick on the 'cyborgisation of man' is very popular in science; very impressive in science business is the costly $ 1.3 billion Human Brain Project for 2020 lead by Dr. Henry Markram [4], a South African born neuroscientist working at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH Zurich). Many of the implications of technical innovation made available by Science affect in an indirect way the healthiness of the moral and spiritual realms.

In his work, L. Magnani endeavours to show the various ways Man has thought of himself, or rather how people have been looked upon over time and perhaps between classes too. To put things bluntly, immoral people use others to their ends. People have often been thought of as a means of obtaining something such as consideration, access to others, favours, goods or new status, and here the list could go on to be very long. In a lesser blunt way, we could call this interpersonal negotiation, a process in which people respectively agree to use one another whenever possible. To put things scientifically, envisioning the said situations here could or should employ discourse analysis, discursive strategies or like approaches from the philosophy of language in order to confirm the

theory of the existence of general ambient everyday immorality in our lives. I do not intend to do so here for lack of time. But this does seem to suggest in a clear way that immorality does not always have the effect of a shock, but is an issue of degree.

To come back to what Magnani argues for in his book on *Morality in a Technological World* [5], he says people should be considered in *another* way or rather in a more relevant way: as *things*, yes that's right, as objects! because people are now part of technological systems and technology is becoming part of people. The work on the role and effects of the digital natives in society carried out by V. Guliciuc (as presented at a workshop entitled '.mERGERs. Physical and Cognitive Mutations in Humans and Machines' held in Laval, France, April 24-25, 2009) as well as the increasing number of conferences and scientific publications incorporating the notion of the human being in theories about complex entities in our world seem to point out the relevance of philosopher Magnani's appreciating people for what they are, parts of a whole.

I have been working on different aspects of the convergence between humans and machines, and it is also reasonable to think of the object of my work as one (more or less solid) entity. Without a totally holistic vision of the *thing* it is very difficult to find solutions to problems viewed from either standpoint, the human being's standpoint, or that of the machine. Finding this balance was entirely responsible for enabling me, in this context, to apply the logic of the relation so elegantly suggested by Bertrand Russell so long ago in *Our Knowledge of the External World* [6]. As a universal logic, it may be applied in any contexts offering parts and wholes. So yes, in this (analytical) respect, a person can only most definitely be a thing.

3. Should we be afraid of our own 'social galvanism'?

Over the last half a century, Man has drastically changed his view on what he is and what he can do to himself and his environment; especially in the seemingly last years of spirituality in Western Europe. As a matter of fact, he has so to such a point that one would not be surprised if a scientist wrote a book entitled '*Our Manipulation of the External World*'; B. Russell would turn over in his grave! From 'knowledge of' to 'manipulation of' is a very bold step. My almost only hypothetical comparison here goes to go where we stand epistemologically; are most not on the verge of throwing morality out the window? Such a position is being reinforced by the political turbulence affecting Science and its institutions today.

I feel that our collective society has come to a point in which uncertainty reigns wildly; we are at a turning point in which, for some people, there exists confrontation between tradition and techno-science, and for others, the issue does not exist! Here I would have to refer to the Transhumanist movement, along with its now many followers and people present in the media like R. Kurzweil of the Singularity Institute (N. Bostrom of Oxford University, Co-founder of the (former) World Transhumanist Association is, to some extent, an

exception here as he does admit technology is starting to furnishes us with grave problems like for the control of what one accepts to do to one's body in the quest for immortality [7]). The issue of possible difficulties for people living on indefinitely was raised at the second edition of the French Transhumanist Association's conference in France, N. Vita-More, currently Chair of Humanity+, seemed to dismiss the question as she did not see the need for it. At the 'Ethics meets Well-being' session of the international conference on 'Enhancing the Human Experience via Emerging Technologies', March 27-28th (Laval, France), A. De Grey offered a mathematical demonstration supporting the view that people will be healthier longer but that there is uncertainty as to effects on the unhealthy life-end period.

With respect to the technical wherewithal available today, it would be quite easy to lose sight of what is essential, being dazed by all the possible futures we can choose from. Here a brutal idea surges forth in my mind, what if robotic care-givers for the elderly were accused of isolating the elderly in old folks homes? The implications of this are emotional, financial and legal. This is just one example. Abiding by the discourse on morality and ethics (i.e. in the writing of L. Magnani, Bernard Williams and James Moor amongst others) is fine, but we need better understanding to defend the social individual in the future. The 'roboticisation' of our society is not to be feared? Given the spiritual force that lies somewhat dormant within Man, general 'technicisation' of *homo sapien*s does seem to lurk near. But after all, we must, in all logicality, take heed to the fact that Man is the creator of technology and the 'roboticisation of society' is an artefact.

4. Conclusion: towards subjective rationality

The analysis I offer here could gain from taking things to a level at which specialists of robotics and Artificial Intelligence do not seem singled out. It would seem that Science in general has caused Man to not be as ordinarily spiritual as he may otherwise be in absence of the scientific pull of modern society. The following question could hold true for our general human condition: to be systematised or not to be systematised? With the omnipresence of Science today, the human being lives incessantly in a nightmarish dream. Live is both exhilarating and oppressing. It has become absolutely necessary to recentre Science within its traditional margins.

What this means is that I an academic think that science acts in our lives in the various areas of human life it should not. For example, often in experimental psychology, the scientist emits hypothesis and either confirm/infirm them; at times, the scientist operates in subjective ways which may influence the results despite a 'clear objective approach'. 'Wishful thinking' of the like in turn produces *forced knowledge* that non-scientists can only accept as truth *because it comes from Science*. Likewise, Science operates outside of its usual framework in a transhumanist context for example that incites a person to modify his or her body (and thus thinking) inasmuch as the technical

transhumanistic offer comes forth automatically to *replace* – and not respond to – the demand which, ordinarily, would not even exist. This said, the technological conclusions generated by science have come to represent a *novel form of spirituality* today. One need only to observe the 'special relationship' Apple i-Phone users entertain with their devices.

Another last but not least example of Science stepping out of line has a very important effect on peoples of many nations. When the very language of a person is rejected by the 'politico-mathematic regime' of globalisation, a significant part of the person — his means of thought and expression — is in a way lost. The high impact factor of a scientific article written in English seems to enhance the intellectual activity therein rendered whilst de-valuing cultural origins of the foreign author-scientist involved.

Science comprised of the errors explored in this article goes to show the importance of taking the time to think about science. The risk of scientific thought skewing our way of life can be crucial, but also controversial, which in itself is not a bad thing. The principal function of a controversy is to 'correct' the societal perversion of Science, whether potential or proven real.

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